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NEW SPAN COMING

Troubled waters ahead for Pierce County's historic McMillin Bridge?

A piece of Pierce County history may be headed for a change.

AVANI NADKARNI; THE PUYALLUP HERALD

Published: 08/05/10 12:46 pm

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A piece of Pierce County history may be headed for a change.

The McMillin Bridge, also known as the Puyallup River Bridge, is being replaced by the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT).

"It itself is not up to current safety standards and traffic, so (WSDOT) is planning to replace it with a new bridge," WSDOT Cultural Resource Specialist Roger Kiers explained of the bridge, which is located just east of South Hill.

WSDOT is proposing to build a new structure directly east of the current bridge, according to Pierce County Long Range Planning Supervisor Sean Gaffney.

"The new bridge will have wider lanes and wider shoulders to meet current engineering and safety standards," Gaffney said in an e-mail to Pierce County Landmarks and Historic Preservation Commissioners. "Once the new bridge is completed, WSDOT proposes to demolish the original bridge."

Kiers called the bridge "quite unique." Considering it was put on the National Register of Historic Places in 1982, WSDOT Bridge Historian Craig Holstine said that's an understatement.

The bridge was built from 1934 to 1935 and the majority of the features and layout were constructed by Homer Hadley, who Holstine called "the most significant bridge engineer in Washington history ... certainly the most innovative." Hadley also provided details for the Lacey Murrow Bridge, better known as the I-90 floating bridge, the first concrete floating bridge in the world, Holstine explained.

The McMillin Bridge "is of exceptional importance because we think it's one of a kind in the world," he added. "It's a concrete ... truss and it's a truss configuration (that is) unique."

Truss bridges, which use tension and compression, are economical to construct.

Still, after decades of wear and tear, Kiers and Holstine both agree the bridge is ready for a remodel. Because it is on the National Registry of Historic Places and the construction will require obtaining federal permits, Holstine said there are some restrictions.

"The National Historic Preservation Act ... requires that agencies consider their effects on historic properties and seek alternatives to avoid adverse effect," Holstine explained. "Eventually a memorandum of agreement ... will be included by the agencies involved (such as WSDOT) as well as consulting parties."

Gaffney said he has indicated that Pierce County would like to be one of the consulting parties. Anyone can ask to become one, he explained.

"We will have a seat at the table and we'll move forward from there," he explained.

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As a consulting party, Gaffney said county representatives will express the concerns of members of the Landmarks and Historic Preservation Commission.

"The state put the bridge on the National Register of Historic Places ... so the commission would like the bridge to stay there," Gaffney said. "They also want the state to consider keeping it as an extra way (to leave the area) in case of a lahar. These are not solutions, just ideas."

Reach Sumner Reporter Avani Nadkarni at 253-841-2481, Ext. 314 or e-mail at avani.nadkarni@puyallupherald.com.

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calducks3 wrote on 08/05/2010 01:27:02 PM:

An extra way to leave in case of a lahar??????? Two bridges but no more road on either side, so as a way to move vehicles during a lahar it would be useless.

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